

1608/558.
THE

Blessedness of the Poor in Spirit.

A
SERMON

Preach'd before the

QUIETEN

AT

St. James's, Nov. 17. 1706.

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Chaplain in Ordinary to Her Majesty.

Published by Her Majesty's Special Command.

The Second Edition.

L O N D O N,

Printed by J. L. for W. KETTERBY, at the

Bishop's Head in St Paul's Church-yard. 1707.

St. MATTH. V. 3.

Blessed are the Poor in Spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.

IN Discoursing on these Words, 'twill be, I think, most proper to proceed in this Method: First, to enquire who are meant by *the Poor in Spirit*; and then to shew wherein consists their present Blessedness, and what will be their future Reward.

And by *the Poor in Spirit* (among several Interpretations that are given of the Phrase) it seems to me most obvious and reasonable to understand such as have *the Spirit of the Poor*, or *a Spirit of Poverty*; *The Poor in Spirit* seem to be opposed to *the Poor in Body*, or in the outward Circumstances. The Blessedness of the Text therefore may not belong to all that are commonly call'd Poor; Nay, it is certain it does not; for there are some that are very Poor, and yet very Wicked too; and no wicked Man can be *Blessed*, no wicked Man shall inherit the *Kingdom of Heaven*; Nor yet is this Blessedness confin'd only to those that are Poor; For, as a poor Man may not be of such a Spirit as is suitable to his low Condition, so 'tis possible that a Rich Man (even while he is Rich) may be of that Spirit; and if he be, the Blessedness of the Text belongs to him no less than to a poorer Man of the same Spirit. And he may truly be said to be *Poor in Spirit*, or to have that *Spirit of Poverty*, to which the Text annexes a Blessedness, and promises a Reward, who, whether he be Poor or Rich, or whatever his outward Circumstances are, is of such a Temper or Disposition of Mind, with regard to Riches, and to all other things of this Life, whether good or evil, as they that be poor, are, or as it becomes those that are poor to be; and who is consequently careful to adorn himself with all those Graces which are an Ornament to the Poor, and to practise all those Vertues, which a low Condition in the World is most apt to instruct Men in, and to incite them to.

For the farther Explication whereof it will therefore be needful to consider, what are the proper Vertues of a poor and low Estate, what Vertues do best suit with, do best become a

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low and mean Condition; and then to shew that these same Vertues are also such as every Man of whatsoever State he is, High or Low, Rich or Poor, is bound to endeavour after; and that, as greatly conducing both to his present, and to his future Felicity.

I. Then, One Vertuous Disposition of Mind, very well becoming a State of Poverty, is *Humility*; 'tis but fit that they who are low in the World should be likewise lowly in their own Minds; of all Persons, Pride least becomes such; Poor and Proud do by no means agree together; It is not fit that the Poor should affect Greatness, or strive to make a shew above their Fortune; It becomes them above all others, to be easie in their Address, and courteous and obliging to all whom they converse with, and in all other respects to shew forth in their Carriage the Lowliness and Meekness of their Spirits.

And yet this Grace or Vertue of Humility, tho' it may be said to be most proper to a State of Poverty, is not peculiar to that State only; for 'tis a Duty requir'd of all *Christians* to learn of their Master *Christ*, who was *Matth. x. 29.* *meek and lowly in Heart*; and those Words of our *Lord, Luke xxii. 26.* are directed to such of his Disciples as were to be most of all advanc'd above others in this World, *The Kings of the Gentiles exercise Lordship over them, — but ye shall not be so; but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve.*

And indeed (as the wise Son of *Syrach* observes) *Pride was not made for Man*; neither for *Ecclus. x. 18.* one Man nor for another; Not for Men of high Estate, any more than for Men of low Degree; For neither is the Matter wherein one Man may differ from another, in its self, very considerable; nor if it were, would it be a just Reason of Pride; because, whatever it is, it was the unmerited Gift of *GOD*, who *maketh poor, and maketh rich, who bringeth low, and lifteth up*; and can, *1 Sam. ii. 7.* and does out of the same Lump of Clay, make one Vessel unto Honour, and another unto Dishonour. *Rom. ix. 21.*

And 'tis well argu'd by the *Apostle, 1 Cor. iv. 7.* *Who maketh thee to differ from another; and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?*

Humility therefore, tho' it may be perhaps best learnt in a

low Estate, is manifestly the Duty also of the Rich. And blessed are they, whether they be Poor or Rich, who have this *Spirit of the Poor*; that is, who have an humble Opinion of themselves, and of all things belonging to them, who are little in their own Esteem; neither attributing to themselves any Excellencies or Perfections which they have not, nor over-rating and over-valuing those they have, nor ascribing to themselves the Glory thereof.

They are Blessed above others, as being by this excellent Temper of Mind, and the lovely Fruits and Effects of it in the outward Carriage, rendred amiable and grateful to all that know them; for there is nothing that so adorns and sets off a Man, nothing that so qualifies him for, and entitles him to Respect and Honour, as true Humility; whence
 1 Pet. iii. 4. the *Apostle* calls it, *the Ornament of a meek and quiet Spirit*, which, as it is of great Price in the Sight of GOD, so it is in the Sight of Men too; For Men naturally reverence those who have mean Thoughts of themselves; and on such as do not hunt after Honour, they are most ready and willing to bestow Honour.

They are also blessed above others, because they are more at Ease and Quiet in their own Minds; For being of an humble Spirit, and thinking but meanly of themselves, they are free from Ambition, Envy, Anger, and Revenge, and all such like boisterous and turbulent Passions, which render the Proud very uneasie and unhappy in the greatest Affluence of worldly good Things. An Humble-minded Man, whatever his outward Condition and Circumstances in the World are, is calm, contented and thankful, and envies not the Condition of any that are placed above him; whereas the Proud and Ambitious Man, (as if all the World were made for him alone) never thinks he has enough, or so much as he deserves; and whatever Portion of worldly good Things he has, can take no Comfort or Satisfaction therein, for the want of those things which he has not. Or if (as *Haman* had) he has
 Esth. v. 13. all the Plenty of good Things that his Heart can desire, yet if there be but one *Mordecai* that will not bow the Knee to him, and do him that Reverence which he expects, this alone is sufficient to discontent and disquiet him.

And as the humble in Mind are most Blessed at present, so will

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will they be also for ever; *Theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven;* that is, such, and such only as have this *Spirit of Poverty*, this Humility of Mind, have a Right and Title, by Vertue of God's gracious Promise, to the Eternal Blessedness of the other World. *He that humbleth himself shall be exalted*, Matth. xxiii. 12.

And as the Happiness of Heaven is peculiarly annexed and promis'd to this Grace of Humility, so are also the Degrees of that Happiness, to the several Measures and Degrees of this Grace; The lowlier we are here in our own Thought and Opinion, the higher shall we be there in God's Favour, and our Crown will be so much the more Glorious. For, *Whosoever, says our Lord, shall humble himself as a little Child, the same is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven* Matth. xviii. 4.

II. Another Vertuous Disposition of Mind very necessary to those who are in a poor and low Estate, is *Patience*.

The Poor have need of Patience, because this is one Evil usually attending Poverty, and a greater Evil it is than Poverty it self, that it exposes Men to Scorn and Contempt, makes them subject to Indignities and Affronts, renders them liable to Abuses and Injuries, which they, by reason of the Scantiness of their Fortune and Want of Friends, are by no means able to fence off or avoid; and for what can't be avoided there's no Remedy but Patience. The Poor therefore having such need of Patience, 'tis very requisite that they should be endu'd with it; and the frequent Occasions that they have to exercise it, will naturally put them upon endeavouring to learn it.

But Patience is a Vertue which every Man also has great need of, and will have frequent Occasions for, the Rich as well as the Poor. *For Man is born unto Trouble, as the Sparks fly upward*. Job v. 7. There is indeed no State or Condition of Life free from Trouble, and it is impossible that while we live in a miserable and naughty World we should meet with nothing in it to vex us. He that is above Contempt is the Object of Envy; and he that is not affronted to his Face may be slander'd behind his Back; and he that is too great to be crush'd or trampled upon by others, may yet suffer as great Mischief by secret Treachery; and he that is powerful enough to resist Violence, may not be wary enough to avoid a Snare.

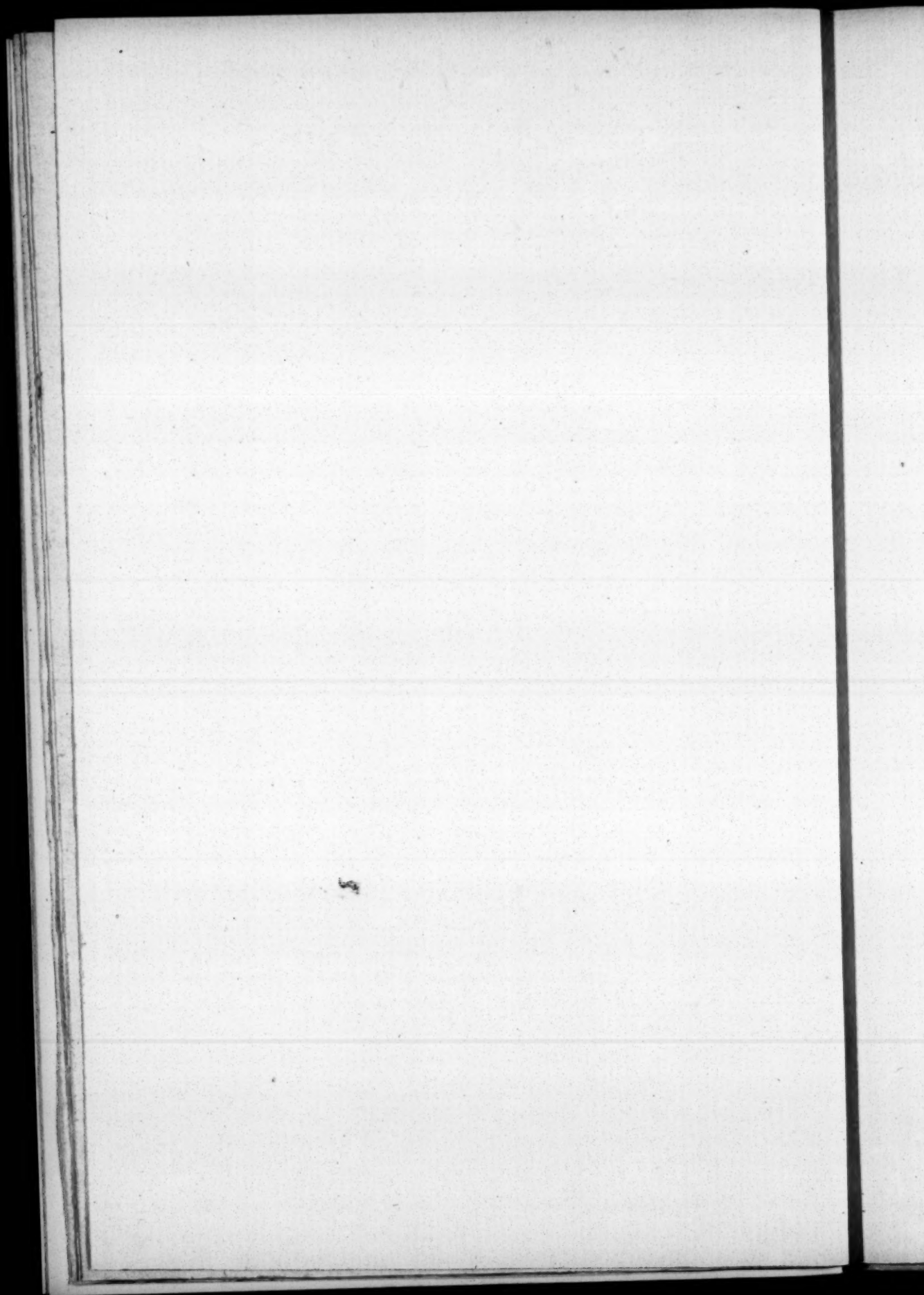
Besides; There are some Evils, and those indeed the greatest of Human Life, which no Quality or Wealth does exempt Men from. For the Rich Man as well as the Poor may have unkind Relations, undutiful Children, false Friends, or unfaithful Servants; The Rich as well as the Poor may be disappointed in his Designs, may be robb'd and spoil'd of what he has, may have a Body very sickly and infirm, and may suffer the sharpest Pains: And all these, and many more such like Evils, which no Man is by any Wealth or Dignity exempted from, are Trials of our Patience, as well as those which are more peculiarly incident to Poverty.

And Blessed are they, whether Rich or Poor, who have this *Spirit of Poverty*; for they are plainly more Blessed than others in their Afflictions, because they are more easie under them; they are not gall'd and disquieted so much by the Evils that befall them as fretful and impatient Men are. They, tho' they are under the very same Affliction with others, yet being calm and quiet in their own Minds, being void of those turbulent Passions which other Men in the like Calamity are subject to, suffer but half the Evil that other Men suffer.

And then this their Patience under their Sufferings conduces no less to their future Felicity; For the Evils and Calamities of this present Life are design'd by God as Trials of Men's Vertue, in which, if they acquit themselves well, they are thereby entitled to the Reward of Vertue; that is, to the Happiness of Heaven; and *these light Afflictions* 1 Cor. iv. 17. *which are but for a Moment, will work for them a far more exceeding and eternal Weight of Glory.*

III. Another Vertuous Disposition of Mind very requisite in the Poor, is *Contentment* with their present Condition, a quiet Resignation of themselves to God's Will, a Liking well those Circumstances which it has pleas'd the Divine Providence to place them in. For the Poor do want many of those Conveniencies of Life which the Rich have; and therefore if they should fret and vex themselves for every thing that they could wish to have, but have not, they would be able to enjoy no Comfort in their Lives; If they should murmur and complain against Providence, and take it ill at God's Hands that he gives them not every thing that they could desire, their whole Life would be Murmuring and Complaint. The only Way therefore for such as are in a low Condition to be tolerably happy,

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delight to live as do the Angels, because he had us'd himself to live so here as much as possibly he could; and had rather, if he could have done it, have liv'd without those sordid Pleasures wherein Sensual Men place their only Felicity.

And lastly, *Frugality* likewise, or a wise and prudent Management of those worldly good things which we have, tho' it may seem a Vertue that is profitable only for this Life, is yet in Truth a Vertue that does no less conduce to our future Happiness. For we are not (as was said before) the Proprietors of those things which we possess, but only Stewards; and we are then faithful in our Stewardship, when we do not lavish away, but husband well what is committed to our Trust; when we do not spend it idly, but improve it to our Master's Honour, or lay it out in such ways as he has directed.

Who, says our Saviour, is that faithful and wise Steward Luk. xii. 42, 43. whom his Lord shall make Ruler over his Household, to give them their Portion of Meat in due season? Blessed is that Servant whom his Lord when he cometh shall find so doing.

VI. Another vertuous Disposition of Mind very requisite to the Poor, and which a mean and low Condition in the World is very apt to work Men to, is a *Contempt of the World*; an indifference of Mind towards it, and a Willingness to part with it. They that live in Ease and Plenty, and meet with no Crosses or Disappointments, can hardly forbear saying with the *Apostles*, *It is good for us to be here.* And there is no Thought more melancholy and unpleasant to them, than to consider that it will not be long before they must be forc'd to leave that Condition of Life with which they are so much pleas'd. *O Death, says the wise Son of Syrach, how bitter is the Remembrance of thee to a Man that liveth Ecclus. xli. 1. at Rest in his Possessions, unto the Man that hath nothing to vex him, and that hath Prosperity in all things?*

But there is plainly no Reason that the Poor should be thus fond of this World, or so loth to go out of it. For what is all their Life here but Labour and Sorrow? They toil and take Pains, they rise early and work late, and, after all, can but just make a hard Shift to live; Their Fare, after all, is but slender, their Accommodations but mean; scarcely can they get enough for necessary Uses, much less can they make Provision for Pleasure and Delight. What is there then in this Condition of Life that can reasonably make Men very desirous to continue long in it, or unwilling to exchange it for the better?

Who is there that delights to be at an Inn; even tho' he has the best Accommodations that the House affords? But if his Lodging be cold or uneasie, and his Diet coarse; and either there are no Conveniencies to be had in the House, or he has not wherewithal to purchase them; this must needs make him still more indifferent; or rather, it must needs make him more desirous to stay there as little a while as is possible, and to make all the haste he can Home, where he hopes he shall find things much more to his liking. Such

Such a Temper of Mind, with Regard to this World, being therefore what a State of Poverty is apt to bring Men to; whoever is of the same Temper and Disposition of Mind, of whatsoever Condition he be, may well be said to have the *Spirit of the Poor*.

And indeed, whatsoever Condition we are of, it is highly reasonable that we should be of this Spirit; for in truth we are all but Strangers and Pilgrims here; we came from a better Place, and we hope we shall go thither again; and tho' while we abide here, some of us perhaps may be better accommodated than others are, yet still we are but as in an Inn, where the greatest Conveniences are more than over-balance'd by the Inconveniences; and when we shall be come home to our Father's House, it will be much better with us all than it can be here. Why then should we be desirous to stay here? Why should we be fond of Life? Why, if we are in a prosperous Condition, should we set our Hearts upon, or place our Happiness in a short-liv'd Pleasure? Or why, if we are afflicted, should we be much vex'd and disquieted by the Uneasiness of a Moment? It will be better for us all, if it be not thro' our own Fault, (it will be better I say) even with those of us who are the most prosperous, when we shall leave this World, than it can be while we continue in it. Why then should we set our Affections upon any thing here? Why rather do we not let our Heart be there where our true Treasure is, and endeavour to sit as loose as we can from this World, which we must so soon go out of? And to this purpose we are exhorted by the *Apostle* (and his Exhortation is general, respecting all Persons alike, the

1 Cor. vii. 29,
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Rich no less than the Poor) *This I say, Brethren, the Time is short; it remaineth that both they that have Wives be as though they had none, and they that weep as though they wept not, and they that rejoice as though they rejoiced not, and they that buy as though they possessed not, and they that use this World as not abusing it: for the Fashion of this World passeth away.* Such an indifference of Mind towards this World well becomes us all, whatever our Condition is, considering what a very short while we have to stay here.

And this Vertue also, no less than the others before mentioned, conduces very much both to our present, and to our future Blessedness. First, There is a present Blessedness belonging to those who are of this Temper. For he that has no great Opinion of the World, or of any thing in it, can't be very eager in his Desire after it; for why should he very earnestly desire what he does not believe would make him much happier? And the fewer things we desire, the easier we are, and the less liable to Disappointment.

And indeed this is the great Unhappiness of all those, that place their Affections upon this World, that they will certainly fail of their Expectation; for either they will not be able to attain to that Condition of Life, which they promis'd themselves so much Happiness in,

or else they will not meet with that great Satisfaction therein which they expected from it. And *Hope deferred maketh the Heart sick*, as the *Wise Man* says. Prov. xiii. 12.

It must needs be a great Vexation to a Man to miss of a thing after he has taken a great deal of Pains for it; Or if he should obtain it, it will be yet a greater Vexation to find that it is not such a thing as he took it for, but that it has rather more Evil in it than Good. And such are all the things of this World; *all is Vanity and Vexation of Spirit*, as *Solomon* truly observes: Eccles. i. 14.

They promise much Satisfaction, but they yield none; and commonly they that have the most of this World have likewise the most Trouble.

He therefore is plainly the happiest Man who is *Poor in Spirit*, who sets not his Mind upon Vanity, upon things that will not satisfy; such an one is above the Reach of Fortune, and will be little concern'd how the World goes; because go it as it will, he has little Interest in it; much he expects not to gain, and much he can't lose; And being thus moderately affected towards this World, and knowing that Happiness can't be had here below, as he will not be much lifted up, so neither can he be much cast down or overwhelm'd with Grief, at any thing that happens to him here; he will bear all Changes of Fortune with an even Mind and a contented Spirit. And this indeed is a great Felicity, to be able to bear well those Troubles which in a troublesome World it is impossible we should escape.

But the greatest Blessedness of such as have their Affections thus wean'd from this World is in Reversion; *Theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven*. If we set our Affections on things above and not on things of the Earth, and seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the Right Hand of GOD, then when Christ who is our Life shall appear, we also shall appear with him in Glory, as the Apostle says, Colos. iii. 1, 2.

And to confirm and establish our Faith in the Truth of this Promise it may be further consider'd, that such as these have a Title, not only by Promise, but likewise in Equity to the Happiness that is here promis'd. I mean this, that considering the Goodness of GOD, there seems to be a Congruity, a sort of Equity in it, that every Man should have his Portion of good things as well as of evil things, some time or other, here or hereafter, in this World or in the next. And this seems to be the Ground of that Answer which in the *Parable of the Rich Man* and *Lazarus*, *Abraham* makes to the Rich Man in Hell, when he had desir'd some Abatement of his Torment. *Son, says Abraham, remember that thou in thy life time receivest thy good things, and Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and thou art tormented.*

Forasmuch therefore as they, whether they be Rich or Poor, who

who are endued with this *Spirit of the Poor* (having a Mind wean'd from this World, and all the Enjoyments of Sense) do not value much these wordly good things, nor place their Happiness therein; it seems congruous and agreeable, that they should have some other Happiness, which is more suited and adequate to their Desires, or else they would be in worse Condition and more unhappy than other Men. And such a Happiness there is provided for them, a Happiness pure and unmix'd, a Joy yielding full Satisfaction, as great as we can desire, and far greater than we can now conceive; *theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.*

VII. Lastly; Another Vertuous Disposition of Mind which Poverty of State or a low Condition in the World is naturally apt to work in Men, is a *pitiful and compassionate Temper.*

The Poor are liable to more Pains and Sufferings in the World than others; they are sometimes hungry and have nothing to eat, thirsty and have nothing to drink, are cold and have not Raiment enough to keep themselves warm, are pinch'd with the Weather, and have no House to shelter themselves in; these and the like Evils they have often been forc'd to suffer, and they know by Experience how hard it is to be without the Accommodations of Life; having therefore been in this disconsolate Condition themselves, they are naturally apt to have Compassion upon others when they see them in the like Condition, so that Compassion upon others in Distress may well be reckon'd one of the Vertues of Poverty, or a Vertue which Poverty is most apt to teach; and consequently, whoever is of a Compassionate Temper may be said to have the *Spirit of the Poor.*

But tho' this be a Vertue best taught by Poverty, it is what Men in all Conditions, the Rich as well as the Poor, are bound to learn and practise. For it is the Duty of all Men, as being all Members of the same Body, to have a fellowfeeling of the Sufferings of any other

Part or Member of the Body. *Whether, says the Apostle, one Member suffer, all the Members suffer with it; or one Member be honoured, all the Members re-*

joyce with it. Now ye are the Body of Christ, and Members in particular. But tho' all are alike oblig'd to have pity on others in Distress, all cannot make the like Expressions of their Pity. For they that are Poor themselves can only commiserate the Wants of other Poor, but it is not in their power to relieve them; they can only *weep with those that weep*, but they can't ease them of their Sorrow; whereas the Rich have it in their Power to do well, as well as to wish well, to such as are in Want and Distress; it is their part therefore not only to give good Words and good Wishes, but more substantial Comfort; not only to *say to a Brother or a Sister that is naked and destitute of daily Food, Depart in Peace; be ye warmed and filled*, but to *give them those things which are needful for the Body.* Jam. ii. 15.

And

And Blessed are they who have this *Spirit of the Poor*; that is, who are of such a pitiful and compassionate Temper as Poverty is apt to teach; who, altho', in Prosperity themselves, are yet as ready to relieve the Wants and Necessities of others, as Men in the like Afflictions and Adversities would be, if they were able.

They are Blessed even at present, for as our Saviour was used to say, *It is more blessed to give than to receive*; there is certainly more Pleasure in doing Kindnesses than in receiving them; for the Pleasure of receiving a Kindness is a sensual Pleasure, consisting in the easing of that Pain which the Man was before in, and it is (as all other sensual Pleasures are) of short Continuance; for a Man may be little the better now for a Kindness that was done him some while ago; but the Pleasure of doing Good is chiefly a Pleasure of the Mind, procuring great Joy and Delight, not only at the time when we do the Kindness, but whenever after we reflect upon what we have done.

They that are of this pitiful and compassionate Temper, and shew forth the same, as they have Ability and Opportunity, in Acts of Mercy and Charity, are also Blessed at present, because they are entitled to the Blessing of GOD upon all that they take in Hand, who does commonly even in this Life render to them an hundred fold in Temporal Blessings, for the Kindness which they shew to others in Distress. *Blessed is he, says the Psalmist, that considereth the Poor, the Lord will deliver him in time of Trouble. The Lord will preserve him and keep him alive, and he shall be blessed upon the Earth; and thou wilt not deliver him into the Will of his Enemies. The Lord will strengthen him upon the Bed of Languishing, thou wilt also make all his Bed in his Sickness.* And, He, says Solomon, *that hath pity upon the Poor, lendeth unto the Lord, and that which he hath given will he pay him again.* Ps. xli. 1, 2, 3. Prov. xix. 17.

But the chief Blessedness of these *Poor in Spirit* is also in Reversion; Blessed are they who have this *Spirit of Poverty*, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven; There are none so sure to receive Mercy from GOD at the great Day, as they who in this Life shew Mercy to others in Distress. *When the Son of Man shall come in his Glory*—says our Saviour, *before him shall be gather'd all Nations*—and he shall set the Sheep on his right Hand, and the Goats on his left;—and shall say unto them on his right hand, *Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the Foundation of the World; For I was an hungred and ye gave me Meat; I was thirsty and ye gave me Drink; I was a Stranger and ye took me in; Naked and ye cloathed me; I was Sick and ye visited me; I was in Prison and ye came unto me.*—For inasmuch as ye have done these things to one of the least of these my Brethren, ye have done them unto me. Matt. xxv. 31, &c. Ru

By this Account of the Proceedings at the great Day of Judgment, it should seem as if nothing would be then enquir'd into, but only whether we have had this *Spirit of Poverty*; that is, whether we have been Pitiful and Compassionate to the Poor and Needy, and others in Distress, and have been free and liberal in our Bounty towards them. But tho' this be not so, (for we are told in other places, that God will then *bring every Work into Judgment*) yet I think it may be fairly argu'd from hence, that at the great Day of reckoning special Regard will be had to the Discharge of this Duty; that tho' this alone will not be sufficient to entitle us to the Reward of Heaven, the want of it alone will be sufficient to forfeit our Title to it; according to that of St. James, *He shall have Judgment without Mercy who have shewed no Mercy*; and that tho' this alone will not qualifie us for the Kingdom of Heaven, it is one of the most necessary Qualifications for it.

I shall only add, for the Conclusion of all; that altho' the Vertues and Graces before mention'd (and if there be any other of the like Kind, which, because most readily learn'd, or most easily practis'd in a low Condition, may be called Vertues of Poverty) are, as has been shewn before, alike necessary to Men of all Conditions, in order to the rendring their Lives here easie, and to qualifie them for the Kingdom of Heaven; yet, when they are found in Persons of nobler Birth, of higher Quality, and of more plentiful Estates, they shine with greater Lustre, and so become more exemplary to the rest of the World; For which reason, and especially because they are commonly with more difficulty learn'd and exercis'd by such Persons than by Men of meaner Rank, as they are in them more excellent and Praise-worthy than in others, so, it may well be thought, they will also be rewarded with higher Degrees of Glory.

Thus, *Blessed are the Poor in Spirit, or they who have the Spirit of Poverty, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.*

Which Blessedness that we may all attain, GOD of his Infinite Mercy grant, for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all Honour and Glory, now and for ever; Amen.



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